

Ridin? the rails

by BRIAN LOCKHART

With modern technology and everything that goes with it, society has really come to depend on speed. Not speed in terms of whipping down the highway at 150 kmh, but in terms of expecting everything to happen fast. Our attention span has become pretty short.

That explains why TV commercials are now 15 seconds long. No one pays attention after about ten seconds.

With everyone's attention span being so short, I keep waiting to see concerts starting to wrap up after 30 minutes, or stage plays reduced to a series of brief skits rather than a three-act, two hour production.

I'm certainly guilty of being part of the short attention span syndrome.

I routinely watch YouTube videos or short productions on other streaming services.

You can watch live action news that takes less than a minute and skips the commercials and list of credits. You can watch your favourite scenes from classic movies.

Some smart movie makers have actually created entertaining short film series with characters they have created or borrowed, that are less than five minutes long.

Recently I broke with the usual pattern and watched a YouTube video that was 1 hour and 21 minutes in length, although admittedly I did fast forward at times.

The video was produced by a guy who went by the name of Stobe the Hobo.

I live next to the CP rail line and it is routine that you have to stop and wait for a train to pass. Never once in 19 years have I seen a hobo perched at the end of a caboose or waving from a box car.

And yet, Stobe the Hobo did ride that train past my house at one time, but I didn't see him. I didn't think there really were any hobos out there any more.

When you think of the hobo, the first thought that often comes to mind is the 1930's when men criss-crossed the country looking for work, and if caught by the railroad 'bulls', were given a sound beating with a billy club.

I have watched hobo videos in the past. There are guys out there who ride the rails strictly to make videos.

Stobe the Hobo became one of those guys. He had a large, but not huge, following of people who would watch his videos as he dodged the railway police, camped track-side, and caught a moving freight train for his next adventure.

He was quite the character.

The video I watched detailed Stobe's quest to ride a freight train from Vancouver to Toronto in what he called his 'Canadian Adventure.'

Accompanied by his camera man, who was like the Teller to his Penn and didn't speak, they had a nice ride through the mountains of British Columbia, before stopping at a few towns and seeing the sights.

The opening of the video showed the necessary supplies for being a hobo ? that included three quarts of various beers. This became a featured part of the video.

In an interview several years ago, Stobe admitted that he had risked his life several times by either jumping aboard, or jumping off a moving train while in an alcoholic haze.

Poor Stobe couldn't believe the price of beer in Vancouver when he was starting out. Several times in the video their main concern is finding more brew. They looked forward to visiting Ontario where they heard beer was cheap. That became another disappointment on the tour.

It was interesting to see an American's reaction when visiting some of the northern towns where they ended up. He was quite impressed with the 'castle style' architecture in Kenora, of all places, although he again complained about the price of beer.

Apparently suds are dirt cheap in his home state of Colorado.

Stobe the Hobo, aka, James Stobie, wasn't your run of the mill hobo. In addition to being a former Coast Guard sailor, he had a bachelor's degree in music and composed and played the music for his videos.

The video ends with Stobe and his silent camera man arriving in Toronto, tucked into a small sitting area at the end of a rail car, then finally checking into a downtown hotel for a real night's sleep and a shower.

It wasn't until later when I read the comments section that I saw a note 'RIP Stobe the Hobo?' and a date.

Sure enough, Stobe the Hobo 'caught the west bound' in hobo speak, at age 33.

His body was found laying along some train tracks near Baltimore in 2017.

According to reports he was caught on a bridge as a train passed and it snagged his backpack, taking Stobe for one final ride.

Stobe the Hobo may be gone, but he left behind a legacy of videos that for some of us with short attention spans, are good for some late night entertainment that doesn't require a lot of thought.